

Mitch McConnell, Lamar Alexander, Rick Scott, Tom Cotton, Mike Crapo, Cory Gardner, Ron Johnson, James Lankford, Roger F. Wicker, Marco Rubio, Cindy Hyde-Smith, Thom Tillis, Shelley Moore Capito, John Boozman, Joni Ernst, Mike Braun, Pat Roberts.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Brian Noland, of Tennessee, to be a Member of the Board of Directors of the Tennessee Valley Authority for a term expiring May 18, 2024, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. ALEXANDER), the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. BURR), the Senator from Texas (Mr. CRUZ), the Senator from Wyoming (Mr. ENZI), the Senator from Nebraska (Mrs. FISCHER), the Senator from Georgia (Mrs. LOEFFLER), the Senator from Kentucky (Mr. PAUL), the Senator from Georgia (Mr. PERDUE), the Senator from Idaho (Mr. RISCH), and the Senator from South Dakota (Mr. ROUNDS). Further, if present and voting, the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. ALEXANDER) would have voted "yea."

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from California (Ms. HARRIS) is necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. DAINES). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 84, nays 5, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 281 Ex.]

YEAS—84

| | | |
|--------------|------------|------------|
| Baldwin | Graham | Portman |
| Barrasso | Grassley | Reed |
| Bennet | Hassan | Roberts |
| Blackburn | Hawley | Romney |
| Blunt | Heinrich | Rosen |
| Booker | Hirono | Rubio |
| Boozman | Hoeven | Sasse |
| Braun | Hyde-Smith | Schatz |
| Brown | Inhofe | Schumer |
| Cantwell | Johnson | Scott (FL) |
| Capito | Jones | Scott (SC) |
| Cardin | Kaine | Shaheen |
| Carper | Kelly | Shelby |
| Casey | Kennedy | Sinema |
| Cassidy | King | Smith |
| Collins | Klobuchar | Stabenow |
| Coons | Lankford | Sullivan |
| Cornyn | Leahy | Tester |
| Cortez Masto | Lee | Thune |
| Cotton | Manchin | Tillis |
| Cramer | McConnell | Toomey |
| Crapo | Menendez | Udall |
| Daines | Merkley | Van Hollen |
| Durbin | Moran | Warner |
| Ernst | Murkowski | Whitehouse |
| Feinstein | Murphy | Wicker |
| Gardner | Murray | Wyden |
| Gillibrand | Peters | Young |

NAYS—5

| | | |
|------------|---------|--------|
| Blumenthal | Markey | Warren |
| Duckworth | Sanders | |

NOT VOTING—11

| | | |
|-----------|----------|--------|
| Alexander | Fischer | Perdue |
| Burr | Harris | Risch |
| Cruz | Loeffler | Rounds |
| Enzi | Paul | |

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 84, the nays are 5.

The motion is agreed to.
The Senator from Texas.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, the fact that we are here on a Sunday indicates to me something is different about what we are about and, to me, speaks to a sense of urgency that we ought to have to complete our work before the Christmas holiday, and there are few things more pressing than our agenda today.

Government funding, as we know, is scheduled to expire at 12 midnight tonight, and unless we take action in the next few hours, our country will be thrown into another government shutdown. I hope every Member of this body can understand why this is simply not an option. I have heard some people talk about, well, it is not a real shutdown if it happens for just a few hours or a couple of days over the weekend, but I think the appearance is horrible and speaks to our not living up to our responsibility to do this on a timely basis and without any lapse in government funding. This is not the time to furlough hard-working public servants or send our various governmental Departments and Agencies into chaos.

We need to pass a funding bill that will provide stability for the remainder of the fiscal year, through the end of September next year, and give our government the ability to operate with certainty. All you have to do is talk to the leaders at the Pentagon, and they will tell you how chaotic and inefficient it is when Congress passes short-term continuing resolutions, which speaks to the importance of providing some certainty and predictability to the funding stream, but we know government funding is only one of the things left to do on our list.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. President, our country is racing to distribute two now successful vaccines to bring an end to this pandemic that we have been living through that has claimed the lives of more than 315,000 Americans. Millions of workers have lost their jobs. They have no income. They lost those jobs either weeks or several months ago and have been struggling to support themselves and their families. Sometimes I wonder, as we delay in responding and providing additional relief, whether those who receive paychecks have sufficient empathy for those who are receiving no paychecks. Time is of the essence.

Small businesses are crunching the numbers, trying to determine how much longer they can hang on and keep their employees on the payrolls, if they have been able to at all.

Of course, teachers are doing the best they can to teach our children virtually or in hybrid situations, with some children going back to the classroom. This has been a tragic circumstance, I believe, particularly for many low-income children for whom virtual learning is simply not an option or is simply failing them because

many of them have no access to broadband. They may not have sufficient supervision at home to help them through their studies. To me, it is incredible that we expect to put children who are in elementary school in front of computer screens for 8 hours a day and expect them to get what they need in terms of their education.

Of course, none of this is news. We have known about not only the need but the urgency of each of these priorities for months now. Unfortunately, the partisan dysfunction leading up to the election prevented us from making more progress since the CARES Act was passed last March. Yet, with the election in November, we finally saw some interest on the part of congressional leaders on both sides of the aisle, on both sides of the Capitol, in negotiating a compromise.

There are many of our colleagues—some of whom are sitting here in the Chamber today—who have dedicated a lot of time and effort to trying to help the leadership build a consensus and get to yes, which I hope we will get to very soon. We know there have been a lot of negotiations and a lot of loose ends, but vaccines, workers, small businesses, and schools should be our priority.

According to the Democratic leader and the majority leader, we apparently are just hours away from finalizing a bipartisan deal, but none of us have actually seen the text yet of what this looks like. The only responsible thing is for us to be able to study it and understand exactly what is happening. The House Committee on Rules, presumably, will meet and pass a rule, and then it will go to the House floor. I know some people are saying we can get this done today. To me, that seems unlikely, but I guess we can all hope. I hope we do this responsibly and not just quickly.

We do know that the American people are suffering and that this is not the time for politics or delay for delay's sake. This is a time to come together to compromise and make good on the commitment we have made to support the American people. I am sort of expecting smoke signals from some quarters, but I hope the signs that we are all trying to read, the tea leaves and the like, become a lot clearer today so that we can chart a clear path forward to both government funding and coronavirus relief.

While the size and shape of this legislation is still coming together, I hope it will include legislation I introduced earlier this year to help some of our hardest hit small businesses.

Over the last few months, we have heard much about the incredible success of the Paycheck Protection Program, which deserves all of the accolades it has received because it has provided a vital lifeline to America's small businesses and their employees.

These loans helped employees make payroll and cover business expenses during the most difficult parts of the

pandemic, and by any measure, the program has been an incredible success.

But not all small businesses have been eligible for the Paycheck Protection Program, and some of the most heavily impacted are our small, independent venues. These businesses were the first to close when COVID-19 hit, and they are likely to be the last to open when it is behind us.

Live, cultural, musical, theatrical events are not only critical cultural institutions, but they are huge drivers of local economies.

A single event can provide paychecks not only to the artists and performers but to lighting and sound technicians, bartenders, ticket takers, concessions, and merchandise salesmen, as well as security guards, cleaning staff, and the list goes on and on.

Unlike restaurants, which have been able to offer at least carryout or outdoor dining, or retailers, which switched to curbside pickup, there is no virtual substitution for these live events.

That is why, working with the Senator from Minnesota, Senator KLOBUCHAR, I introduced the Save Our Stages Act so that these venues can be kept afloat so that when we are able to put the virus behind us, our favorite, small, independent venues will be able to open their doors once again.

This is a stressful and scary moment for the Texans who work at and frequent our favorite venues, and the Save Our Stages Act can provide some hope for these cultural institutions.

I am proud to say that 58 of our colleagues have cosponsored Save Our Stages, making it one of the most widely supported bipartisan proposals before the Senate.

These final hours of negotiations are not the time to try to change the basic contours of that proposal to benefit well-endowed institutions or institutions that don't, frankly, need the money, while these other venues are dying unless they get the money.

Save Our Stages will benefit beloved, small, independent music venues and other theaters and the like across the country and ensure those marquee will shine bright once again.

So as we all know, time is running out. The Congress needs to take action and take action soon.

We cannot add the stress of another government shutdown to a raging pandemic. It is time for us to come together and get this done for the American people.

I yield the floor.

(Mr. HOEVEN assumed the chair.)

(Mr. DAINES assumed the chair.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BARASSO). The Senator from Missouri.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. HAWLEY. Mr. President, I rise today to discuss the COVID relief bill that I understand is soon to be brought before the House and then to this floor.

I understand that we have finally, at long last, a deal that hopefully will re-

sult in real relief for the American people. And there is a piece of good news that I want to be sure to note, and that is that this COVID relief package will contain direct assistance to working people. For every working family in this country that needs it, they will be, under this deal, getting a direct check just like they did in March.

Now, that is a victory. There are no two ways about it, and we should celebrate that victory not on our own behalf but for the many people in this Nation who desperately need it and who, until just a few days ago, could expect nothing at all in the way of direct assistance from this body.

I want to thank those who worked so hard to make sure that this relief was available and is going to the working people of this country—not least the President of the United States, who has been very clear, over and over again, that he wants to see direct relief to working families, that it should be the cornerstone of the bill. Of course, I thank Senator SANDERS for his strong stand on this issue, and it has been a privilege to work with him on it.

So this is good news—good news for working families, good news for working people just before Christmas, when they need the help the most.

But I have to say that the levels of support that I understand will be offered to working people are hardly adequate, and we should not pretend otherwise: \$600 per person, \$600 per child. This is a fraction of what was offered to working people in the CARES legislation just a few months ago—legislation, I might add, that every Member of this body voted for—every Member voted for. Now they will be getting only a portion of that. It all adds up to about \$100 billion. And we are told that there just wasn't enough left over, that there just wasn't any more available for working people.

Yet I notice that in the spending bill that we are also going to vote on as part of this package, a bill that costs over \$1 trillion, we managed to have found \$65 million for salmon recovery in the Pacific, \$643 million to carry out international communication activities in the Middle East, \$116 million for the Export-Import Bank, and \$118 million for that sterling example of international leadership, the World Health Organization, which has done more to undermine world health in the last year than I think any international organization in the history of the world.

Then there is the so-called bipartisan proposal, which is the basis for the present deal—the bipartisan proposal which included, I might point out, not a cent—not a cent—in direct relief for working people—almost \$1 trillion in costs, not one penny in direct relief for working people, until it was added recently. That proposal included \$20 billion for higher education—\$20 billion. This is going to many universities that have massive endowments worth billions and billions of dollars, most of that built on the backs of taxpayers, I

might add. Yet we cannot find any further funds to help working people in this country.

I cannot help but note that working people were the last consideration in the draconian shutdowns earlier this year that sent so many of them home, that cost them their jobs, that cost them their wages, that cost them their healthcare on the job, and they have consistently been the last consideration in COVID relief in this body ever since. Frankly, it is disgraceful and, frankly, it is unacceptable.

So the work that we are going to do today—and I hope to see a vote on this floor yet today on this relief—is a step—a step—in the right direction, but it is only a step. And I hope that it will be the beginning of a better approach, the beginning of actually putting working Americans first, putting their needs, putting their independence, putting their strength, their families, their communities first.

That ought to be the economic policy of this Nation. That ought to be the economic policy of this body. And I can assure you, that is the foundation on which economic recovery will be built because it is the working people of this Nation who power the American economy.

Don't believe anything else. We hear a lot about global capital. We hear about the need to secure the financial markets—oh, and, by the way, the Federal Reserve. We are taking back \$430 billion from the Federal Reserve in this piece of legislation—\$430 billion from the Federal Reserve—funded to the max. Wall Street—funded to the max.

But I say again: Wall Street, capital, the financial markets—they are not the foundation of this economy. The working people of this Nation, the working people of Missouri, the working people of our other States—they are the foundation of this economy, and it is time that they were put first—first for COVID relief, first in our economic policy, first in all that we do.

So I hope that this effort to get them direct assistance will be the beginning of a larger effort to orient our economic policy and the policy of this Nation around the strength and the independence and the needs of our great working Americans.

I want to end by saying thank you to them, thank you to the working people of Missouri who have endured through this crisis day in and day out, who have gone to work as essential workers, who have taken care of children at home, who have missed shifts at work in order to care for loved ones, who have contributed food to others in need even when they didn't have enough food for themselves, who have gone without in order to see that their children could eat.

The people of this country, the working people who have sacrificed again and again and again and have borne the brunt of this pandemic and have continued to show up for their families, for